

Dear Chairs Elliott and Slap, Vice Chairs Turco and Flexer, Ranking Members Haines and Witkos, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Brook Smith and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for H.B. 5033, an Act addressing the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. This bill would require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students and to increase access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program for eligible students at institutions of higher education.

Black and low-income students are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. A study done by the University of Connecticut estimated that around 35% of Connecticut college students suffer from food insecurities. Amongst these alarming statistics, black students constitute fifty-eight percent, which is 19% higher than the overall rate for students identifying as White or Caucasian. Students experiencing food insecurity have a lower average GPA, and higher rates of depression and nutrition deficiencies.

Students enrolled more than half-time must work at least 20 hours a week to be eligible for SNAP. But with the loss of on-campus work-study jobs and the closure of restaurants and other service sector businesses, many college students are being hit doubly hard—losing income as well as their SNAP benefits, with their route to eligibility cut off. A GAO report from last year showed almost 2 million college students who are potentially eligible have not reported receiving SNAP, many of whom are dissuaded from even applying because of the cryptic language that explains which students can get benefits. One in four students have had to take out loans to cover the cost of food, and one-third know someone who dropped out because they couldn't afford to eat, according to a recent study by Swipe Out Hunger and Chegg. This financial burden does not allow students to perform to the best of their ability in school and elevate themselves into food security.

In conclusion, I urge you to address the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. The consequences of food insecurity impact their ability to perform well in and out of school and have a life-long impact on their development and livelihood. This bill will open the door for food-insecure students to have access to simple, accessible programs like food pantries and expanded SNAP enrollment to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity at success. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Higher Education Committee so that these individuals have a chance at fulfilling their best potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Brook Smith  
New Haven, CT